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CHRISTIANITY

CONSISTENT WITH A

LOVE OF FREEDOM:

BEING AN

ANSWER

TO A

SERMON,

LATELY PUBLISHED

BY THE REV. JOHN CLAYTON.

BY ROBERT HALL, M. A.

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PREFACE.

IT may be proper juſt to remark, that the animadverſions I have made on Mr. Clayton's Sermon did not ariſe from my conviction of there being any thing even of plauſibility in his reaſonings, but from an apprehenſion, that certain accidental and occaſional prejudices might give ſome degree of weight to one of the weakeſt defences of a bad cauſe that was ever undertaken. I have taken up more time in ſhowing that there is no *proper connexion* between the Unitarian doctrine and the principles of liberty than the ſubject may ſeem to require; but this will not be thought ſuperfluous by thoſe who recollect that that idea ſeems to be the great hinge

hinge of Mr. Clayton's diſcourſe, and that it appears amongſt the orthodox part of the Diſſenters to have been productive already of unhappy effects. I ſhall only add, that theſe remarks would have appeared much ſooner but for ſevere indiſpoſition, and that I was induced to write them chiefly from a perſuaſion that they might perhaps, in the preſent inſtance, have ſomewhat of additional weight as coming from one who is *not* an Unitarian.

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Cambridge,
Sept. 17, 1791.

CONTENTS.

SECTION I.

On the duty of private Chriſtians in relation to civil polity. 5

SECTION II.

On the duty of Miniſters in relation to civil government. 22

SECTION III.

On the pretences Mr. Clayton advances for his doctrines. 42

SECTION IV.

On the Teſt Act. 63

BRITISH MUSEUM

CHRISTIANITY,

CONSISTENT WITH A

LOVE OF FREEDOM, &c.

THIS is a period diſtinguiſhed for extraordinary occurrences, whether we contemplate the world under its larger diviſions, or in reſpect to thoſe ſmaller communities and parties, into which it is broken and divided. We have lately witneſſed, with aſtoniſhment and regret, the attempts of a celebrated orator to overthrow the principles of freedom, which he

has rendered himſelf illuſtrious by defending; as well as to cover with reproach the characters of thoſe by whom, in the earlier part of life, he was moſt careſſed and diſtinguiſhed. The ſucceſs of theſe efforts is pretty generally known, and is ſuch as it might have been expected would have been ſufficient to deter from ſimilar attempts. But we now behold a diſſenting miniſter coming forth to the public under the character of a flatterer of power, and an *accuſer of his brethren*. If the ſplendid eloquence that adorns every part of Mr. Burke's celebrated book cannot ſhelter the author from confutation, and his ſyſtem from contempt, Mr. Clayton, with talents ſo far inferior, has but little to expect in the ſame cauſe. It is not eaſy to conceive the motives which could impel him to publiſh his ſermon. From his own account it ſhould ſeem he was anxious to diſabuſe the legiſlature, and to convince them there are many amongſt the diſſenters who highly diſapprove the ſentiments and conduct of the more patriotic part of their brethren.

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How far he may be qualified from his talents or connexions, as a mouth, to declare the ſentiments of any conſiderable portion of the diſſenters, I ſhall not pretend to decide, but ſhall candidly confeſs, there are not wanting amongſt us perſons who are ready upon all occaſions to oppoſe thoſe principles on which the very exiſtence of our diſſent is founded. Every party will have its apoſtates of this kind; it is our conſolation, however, that their numbers are comparatively ſmall; that they are generally conſidered as our reproach, and that their conduct is in a great meaſure the effect of neceſſity, as they conſiſt almoſt entirely of perſons who can only make themſelves heard by confuſion and diſcord. If our author wiſhes to perſuade the legiſlature the friends of arbitrary power are conſpicuous for their number or their rank in the diſſenting intereſt, he has moſt effectually defeated his own intentions, as ſcarce any thing could give them a meaner opinion of that party, in both theſe reſpects, than this publication of its champion.

The ſermon he has obtruded upon the public is filled with paradoxes of ſo ſingular a complexion, and ſo feebly ſupported, that I find it difficult to lay hold of any thing in the form of argument, with ſufficient ſteadineſs for the purpoſe of diſcuſſion.

I ſhall endeavour, however, with as much diſtinctneſs as I am able, to ſelect the fundamental principles on which the diſcourſe reſts, and ſhall attempt, as I proceed, to demonſtrate their falſhood and danger.

Mr. Clayton's favourite maxim is the inconſiſtency of the Chriſtian profeſſion with political ſcience, and the certain injury its ſpirit and temper muſt ſuſtain from every kind of interference with the affairs of government. Political ſubjects he conſiders as falling within the *peculiar* province of the irreligious; miniſters in particular, he maintains, ſhould ever obſerve, amidſt the concuſſions of party, an entire neutrality, or if at any time they depart from this their natural line of conduct, it ſhould only be in defence of the meaſures of govern-

ment in allaying diſſenſions, and in convincing the people they are incompetent judges of their rights. Theſe are the ſervile maxims that run through the whole of this extraordinary diſcourſe; and that I may give a kind of method to the following obſervations upon them, I ſhall ſhew in the firſt place the relation chriſtianity bears to civil government, and its conſiſtency with political diſcuſſion, as conducted either by ordinary Chriſtians or Miniſters; in the next place, I ſhall examine ſome of the pretences on which the author founds his principles.

SECTION I.

On the Duty of common Chriſtians in Relation to civil Policy.

THE momentous errors Mr. Clayton has committed, appear to me to have ariſen from an inattention to the proper deſign of chriſtianity, and the place and ſtation it was intended to occupy. On this ſubject I beg

beg the reader's attention to the following remarks:

1ſt. Chriſtianity was ſubſequent to the exiſtence and creation of man. It is an inſtitution intended to improve and ennoble our nature, not by ſubverting its conſtitution, or its powers, but by giving us a more enlarged view of the deſigns of Providence, and opening a proſpect into eternity. As the exiſtence of man is not to be *dated* from the publication of chriſtianity, ſo neither is that order of things that flows from his relation to the preſent world altered or impaired by that divine ſyſtem of religion. Man, under the Chriſtian diſpenſation, is not a new ſtructure erected on the ruin of the former; he may rather be compared to an ancient fabric, reſtored, when it had fallen into decay, and beautified afreſh by the hand of its original founder. Since chriſtianity has made its appearance in the world, he has continued the ſame kind of being he was before, fills the ſame ſcale in the order of exiſtence, and is diſtinguiſhed

tinguiſhed by the ſame propenſities and powers.

In ſhort, chriſtianity is not a re-organization of the principles of man, but an inſtitution for his improvement. Hence it follows, that whatever rights are founded on the conſtitution of human nature, cannot be diminiſhed or impaired by the introduction of revealed religion, which occupies itſelf entirely on the intereſts of a future world, and takes no ſhare in the concerns of the preſent in any other light than as it is a ſtate of preparation and trial. Chriſtianity is a diſcovery of a future life, and acquaints us with the means by which its happineſs may be ſecured; civil government is altogether an affair of the preſent ſtate, and is no more than a proviſion of human ſkill deſigned to enſure freedom and tranquillity during our continuance on this temporary ſtage of exiſtence. Between inſtitutions ſo different in their nature and their object, it is plain no real oppoſition can ſubſiſt; and if ever they are repreſented in this light, or held inconſiſtent

with

with each other, it muſt proceed from an ignorance of their reſpective genius and functions. Our relation to this world demands the exiſtence of civil government; our relation to a future renders us dependant on the aid of the Chriſtian inſtitution; ſo that in reality there is no kind of contrariety between them, but each may continue without interference in its full operation. Mr. Clayton however, in ſupport of his abſurd and pernicious tenets, always takes care to place civil government and chriſtianity in oppoſition, whilſt he repreſents the former as carrying in it ſomewhat anti-chriſtian and prophane. Thus he informs us, *that civil government is a ſtage erected on which man acts out his character, and ſhews great depravity of heart.* All interference in political parties, he ſtiles *an alliance with the world, a neglecting to maintain our ſeparation, and to ſtand upon our own hallowed ground. There is one way,* ſays he, by which he means to inſinuate there is only one, *in which you may all interfere in the government of your country, and that is by*

prayer

prayer to God, by whom kings reign. Theſe paſſages imply that the principles of civil polity and religion muſt be at perpetual variance, as without this ſuppoſition, unſupported as it is in fact, they can have no force or meaning.

2d. Mr. Clayton miſleads his reader by not diſtinguiſhing the innocent entertainments or ſocial duties of our nature from thoſe acts of piety which fall within the *immediate province* of chriſtianity.

The employments of our particular calling, the ſocial ties and endearments of life, the improvement of the mind by liberal inquiry, and the cultivation of ſcience and of art, form, it is true, no part of the Chriſtian ſyſtem, for they flouriſhed before it was known; but they are intimately connected with the happineſs and dignity of the human race. A Chriſtian ſhould act ever conſiſtent with his profeſſion, but he need not always be attending to the peculiar duties of it. The profeſſion of religion does not oblige us to relinquiſh any undertaking on account of its being *worldly*, for

we muſt then go out of the world; it is ſufficient, that every thing in which we engage, is of ſuch a nature, as will not violate the principles of virtue, or occupy ſo much of our time or attention, as may interfere with more ſacred and important duties.

Mr. Clayton obſerves, *Jeſus Chriſt uniformly waved intereſting himſelf in temporal affairs, eſpecially in the concerns of the then exiſting government*; and hence he draws a precedent to regulate the conduct of his followers. That our Saviour did not intermeddle with the policy of nations, I am as willing as our author to admit; for the improvement of this, any more than any other ſcience which might be extremely ſhort and defective, formed no part of his miſſion, and was rendered beſide quite unneceſſary, by that energy of mind which, prompted by curioſity, by our paſſions and our wants, will ever be abundantly ſufficient to perpetuate and refine every civil or human inſtitution. He never intended that his followers, on becoming Chriſtians,

ſhould

ſhould forget they were men, or conſider themſelves as idle or unintereſted ſpectators on the great theatre of life. The author's ſelection of proofs is almoſt ever unhappy, but in no inſtance more than the preſent, when he attempts to eſtabliſh his doctrine of the unlawfulneſs of a Chriſtian interfering in the adminiſtration of government on our Saviour's ſilence reſpecting it, a circumſtance of itſelf ſufficient to ſupport a quite contrary concluſion; for if it had been his intention to diſcountenance the ſtudy of political ſubjects, he would have furniſhed us, without doubt, with ſome general regulations, ſome ſtated form of policy, which ſhould for ever preclude the neceſſity of ſuch diſcuſſion; or if that were impracticable, have let us into the great ſecret of living without government; or, laſtly, have ſupplied its place, by a theocracy ſimilar to that of the Jews. Nothing of this has he accompliſhed, and we may therefore reſt aſſured, the political affairs of nations are ſuffered to remain in their ancient channels, and to be conducted as oc-

caſions may ariſe, by Chriſtians or by others, without diſtinction.

3d, The principles of freedom ought, in a more peculiar manner, to be cheriſhed by Chriſtians, becauſe they alone can ſecure that liberty of conſcience, and freedom of inquiry, which is eſſential to the proper diſcharge of the duties of their profeſſion. A full toleration of religious opinions, and the protection of all parties in their reſpective modes of worſhip, are the natural operations of a free government; and every thing that tends to check or reſtrain them, materially affects the intereſts of religion. Aware of the force of religious belief over the mind of man, of the generous independence it inſpires, and of the eagerneſs with which it is cheriſhed and maintained, it is towards this quarter the arm of deſpotiſm firſt directs its attacks, while through every period, the imaginary right of ruling the conſcience, has been the earlieſt aſſumed, and the lateſt relinquiſhed. Under this conviction, an enlightened Chriſtian, when he turns his attention

tion to political occurrences, will rejoice in beholding every advance towards freedom in the government of nations, as it forms not only a barrier to the encroachments of tyranny, but a ſecurity to the diffuſion and eſtabliſhment of truth. A conſiderable portion of perſonal freedom may be enjoyed, it is true, under a deſpotic government, or, in other words, a great part of human actions may be left uncontrouled, but with this an enlightened mind will never reſt ſatisfied, becauſe it is at beſt but an indulgence flowing from motives of policy, or the lenity of the prince, which may be at any time withdrawn by the hand that beſtowed it. Upon the ſame principles, religious toleration may have an accidental and precarious exiſtence, in ſtates whoſe policy is the moſt arbitrary; but, in ſuch a ſituation, it ſeldom laſts long, and can never reſt upon a ſecure and permanent baſis, diſappearing for the moſt part along with thoſe temporary views of intereſt or policy, on which it was founded. The

hiſtory of every age will atteſt the truth of this obſervation.

Mr. Clayton, in order to prepare us to digeſt his principles, tells us in the firſt page of his diſcourſe, *that the goſpel diſpenſation is ſpiritual, the worſhip it enjoins is ſimple and eaſy, and if liberty of conſcience be granted, all its exterior order may be regarded under every kind of human government.* This is very true, but it is ſaying no more, than that the chriſtian worſhip may be always carried on, if it is not interrupted, a point, I preſume, no one will contend with him. The queſtion is, can every form of government furniſh a *ſecurity* for liberty of conſcience; or, which is the ſame thing, can the rights of private judgment be ſafe under a government, whoſe profeſſed principle is, that the ſubject has no *rights at all,* but is a vaſſal dependent upon his ſuperior lord. Nor is this a futile or chimerical queſtion, it is founded upon fact. The ſtate to which it alludes, is the condition at preſent of more than half the nations of Europe; and if there were

were no better patriots than this author, it would ſoon be the condition of them all. The bleſſings which we eſtimate highly, we are naturally eager to perpetuate, and whoever is acquainted with the value of religious freedom, will not be content to ſuſpend it on the clemency of a prince, the indulgence of miniſters, or the liberality of biſhops, if ever ſuch a thing exiſted; he will never think it ſecure, till it has a conſtitutional baſis; nor even then, till by the general ſpread of its principles, every individual becomes its guarantee, and every arm ready to be lifted up in its defence. Forms of policy may change, or they may ſurvive the ſpirit that produced them; but when the ſeeds of knowledge have been once ſown, and have taken root in the human mind, they will advance with a ſteady growth, and even flouriſh in thoſe alarming ſcenes of anarchy and confuſion, in which the ſettled order and regular machinery of government, are wrecked and diſappear.

Chriſ-

Chriſtianity, we ſee then, inſtead of weakening our attachment to the principles of freedom, or withdrawing them from our attention, renders them doubly dear to us, by giving us an intereſt in them, proportioned to the value of thoſe religious privileges they ſecure and protect.

Mr. Clayton endeavours to caſt reproach on the advocates for liberty, by attempting to diſcredit their piety, for which purpoſe he aſſures us, to be active in this cauſe is diſreputable, and brings the reality of our religion into juſt ſuſpicion. "*Who are* "*the perſons*, he aſks, *that embark? Are* "*they the ſpiritual, humble, and uſeful* "*teachers, who travel in birth, till Chriſt* "*be formed in the hearts of their hearers?* "*No. They are philoſophical oppoſers of the* "*grand peculiarities of chriſtianity.*" It is of little conſequence of what deſcriptions of perſons the friends of freedom conſiſt, provided their principles are juſt, and their arguments well founded; but here, as in other places, the author diſplays an utter ignorance of facts. Men who know no

age but their own, muſt draw their precedents from it; or if Mr. Clayton had glanced only towards the Hiſtory of England, he muſt have remembered, that in the reign of Charles the Firſt and Second, the chief friends of freedom were the Puritans, of whom many were Republicans, and the remainder zealouſly attached to a *limited* monarchy. It is to the diſtinguiſhed exertions of this party, we are in a great meaſure indebted for the preſervation of our free and happy conſtitution. In thoſe diſtracted and turbulent times, which preceded the reſtoration of Charles the Second, the Puritans, who to a devotion the moſt fervent, united an eager attachment to the doctrines of grace, as they are commonly called, diſplayed on every occaſion a love of freedom, puſhed almoſt to exceſs; whilſt the cavaliers, their opponents, who ridiculed all that was ſerious, and if they had any religion at all, held ſentiments directly repugnant to the tenets of Calvin, were the firm ſupporters of arbitrary power. If the Unitarians then are at preſent diſ-

tinguiſhed for their zeal in the cauſe of freedom, it cannot be imputed to any alliance between their religious and political opinions, but to the conduct natural to a minority, who attempting bold innovations, and maintaining ſentiments very different from thoſe which are generally held, are ſenſible they can only ſhelter themſelves from perſecution and reproach, and gain an impartial hearing from the public, by throwing down the barriers of prejudice, and claiming an unlimited freedom of thought.

4th, Though Chriſtianity does not aſſume any immediate direction in the affairs of government, it inculcates thoſe duties, and recommends that ſpirit, which will ever prompt us to cheriſh the principles of freedom. It teaches us to check every ſelfiſh paſſion, to conſider ourſelves as parts of a great community, and to abound in all the fruits of an active benevolence. The particular operation of this principle, will be regulated by circumſtances as they ariſe, but our obligation to cultivate it is clear

clear and indubitable. As this author does not pretend, the nature of a government has no connexion with the felicity of thoſe who are the ſubjects of it, he cannot without the utmoſt inconſiſtence deny, that to watch over the intereſts of our fellow-creatures in this reſpect, is a branch of the great duty of ſocial benevolence. If we are bound to protect a neighbour, or even an enemy, from violence, to give him raiment when he is naked, or food when he is hungry, much more ought we to do our part, toward the preſervation of a free government; the only baſis on which the enjoyment of theſe bleſſings can ſecurely reſt. He who breaks the fetters of ſlavery, and delivers a nation from thraldom, forms, in my opinion, the nobleſt comment on the great law of love, whilſt he diſtributes the greateſt bleſſing which man can receive from man; but next to that is the merit of him, who in times like the preſent, watches over the edifice of public liberty, repairs its foundations, and ſtrengthens its

cement, when he beholds it haſtening to decay.

It is not in the power of every one, it is true, to benefit his age, or country, in this diſtinguiſhed manner, and accordingly it is no where expreſsly commanded; but where this ability exiſts, it is not diminiſhed by our embracing chriſtianity, which conſecrates every talent to the public good. On whomſoever diſtinguiſhed endowments are beſtowed, as Chriſtians we ought to rejoice, when inſtead of being waſted in vain or frivolous purſuits, we behold them employed on objects of the greateſt general concern; amongſt which thoſe principles of freedom will ever be reckoned, which determine the deſtiny of nations, and the collective felicity of the human race.

5th, Mr. Clayton expreſſes an ardent deſire for the approach of that period, when all men will be Chriſtians. I have no doubt that this event will take place, and rejoice in the proſpect of it; but whenever it arrives, it will be fatal to Mr. Clayton's favorite principles; for the profeſſors of

tianity muſt then become politicians, as the wicked, on whom he at preſent very politely devolves the buſineſs of government, will be no more: or, perhaps, he indulges a hope, that even then, there will be a ſufficient number of ſinners left, to conduct political affairs, eſpecially as wars will then ceaſe, and ſocial life be leſs frequently diſturbed by rapine and injuſtice. It will ſtill, however, be a great hardſhip, that a handful of the wicked ſhould rule innumerable multitudes of the juſt, and cannot fail, according to our preſent conceptions, to operate as a kind of check on piety and virtue. How Mr. Clayton will ſettle this point I cannot pretend to ſay, except he imagines, men will be able to ſubſiſt without any laws or civil regulations, or intends to revive the long exploded tradition of Papias, reſpecting the perſonal reign.

Had chriſtianity been intended only for the benefit of a few, or as the diſtinction of a ſmall fraternity, there might have been ſome pretence, for ſetting its profeſſion in oppo-

oppoſition to human policy, ſince it might then have been conducted without their interference; but a religion, which is formed for the whole world, and will finally be embraced by all its inhabitants, can never be clogged with any ſuch impediment, as would render it repugnant to the ſocial exiſtence of mankind.

SECTION II.

On the Duty of Miniſters in Reſpect to civil Polity.

MR. CLAYTON is extremely ſevere upon thoſe of his brethren, who, forſaking the quiet duties of their profeſſion, as he ſtiles them, have dared to interfere in public affairs. This he conſiders as a moſt flagrant offence, an alarming departure from their proper province, and in the fullneſs of his rage, he heaps upon them every epithet, which contempt, or indignation can ſuggeſt; calls them meddling, convivial, political miniſters, devoid of all ſe-

rioufneſs

rioufneſs and dignity. It is rather extraordinary, this ſevere correction ſhould be adminiſtered by a man, who is, at that moment, guilty of the offence he is chaſtizing; reproaches political preachers in a political ſermon; ridicules theories of government, and at the ſame time advances one of his own, a moſt wretched one indeed, but delivered in a tone the moſt arrogant and deciſive. It is not political diſcuſſion then, it ſeems, that has ruffled the gentle ſerenity of our author's temper; for he too, we ſee, can bend, when it pleaſes him, from his ſpiritual elevation, and let fall his oracular reſponſes on the duty of ſubjects and of kings. But the perſons on whom he denounces his anathemas, have preſumed to adopt a ſyſtem of politics inconſiſtent with his own, and it is leſs his piety than his pride, that is ſhocked and offended. Inſtead of ſubmitting to be moulded by any adept in cringes, any poſture-maſter of ſervility, they have dared to aſſume the bold and natural port of freemen.

It will be unneceſſary to ſay much on the duty of miniſters, in reſpect to political affairs, as many of the reflections which this ſubject would ſuggeſt, have been already advanced under a former head. A few conſiderations, however, preſent themſelves here, to which I ſhall beg the reader's attention.

The duties of the miniſterial character, it will on all hands be confeſſed, are of a nature the moſt ſacred and important. To them ſhould be directed the firſt and chief attention of every perſon who ſuſtains it, and whatever is found to interfere with theſe momentous engagements, ſhould be relinquiſhed as criminal and improper. But there is no profeſſion which occupies the mind ſo fully, as not to leave many intervals of leiſure, in which objects that lie out of its immediate province, will have a ſhare of our attention; and I ſee not, why theſe periods of receſs may not be employed with as much dignity and advantage, in acquiring an acquaintance with the principles of government, as waſted in frivolous

volous amuſements, or an inactive indolence. Mr. Clayton, with his uſual confidence, lays it down as a maxim, that the ſcience of politics cannot be cultivated, without a neglect of miniſterial duties; and one would almoſt be tempted to ſuppoſe, he had publiſhed his ſermon as a confirmation of this remark, as a more ſtriking example of political ignorance in a teacher of religion, has ſcarce ever been exhibited. As far, therefore, as the preacher himſelf is concerned, the obſervation will be admitted in its full force, but he has ſurely no right to make his own weakneſs the ſtandard of another's ſtrength.

Political ſcience, as far as it falls under our preſent contemplation, may be conſidered in two points of view. It may either intend a diſcuſſion of the great objects for which governments are formed, or it may intend a conſideration of the means which may be employed, and the particular contrivances that may be fallen upon to accompliſh thoſe objects. For example, in vindicating the revolution in France, two diſ-

tinct methods may be purſued with equal propriety and ſucceſs. It may be defended upon its *principles* againſt the friends of arbitrary power, by diſplaying the value of freedom, the equal rights of mankind, the folly and injuſtice of thoſe regal or ariſtocratic pretenſions, by which thoſe rights were invaded; accordingly, in this light it has been juſtified with the utmoſt ſucceſs. Or it may be defended upon its *expedients*, by exhibiting the elements of government which it has compoſed, the laws it has enacted, and the tendency of both, to extend and perpetuate that liberty which is its ultimate object. But though each of theſe modes of diſcuſſion fall within the province of politics, it is obvious, the degree of enquiry, of knowledge, and of labour they require, differs widely. The firſt is a path which has been often and ſucceſsfully trod, turns upon principles which are common to all times and places, and which demand little elſe to enforce conviction, than calm and diſpaſſionate attention. The latter method involving a queſtion of expediency,

pediency, not of right, would lead into a vaſt field of detail, would require a thorough acquaintance with the ſituation of perſons and of things, as well as long and intimate acquaintance with human affairs. There are but few miniſters who have capacity or leiſure to become great practical politicians. To explore the intricacies of commercial ſcience, to penetrate the refinements of negociation, to determine with certainty and preciſion the balance of power, are undertakings, it will be confeſſed, which lie very remote from the miniſterial department; but the *principles* of government, as it is a contrivance for ſecuring the freedom and happineſs of men, may be acquired with great eaſe.

Theſe principles our anceſtors underſtood well, and it would be no ſmall ſhame, if, in an age which boaſts ſo much light and improvement, they were leſs familiar to us. There is no claſs of men to whom this ſpecies of knowledge is ſo requiſite, on ſeveral accounts, as diſſenting miniſters. The jealous policy of the eſtabliſhment,

forbids our youth admiſſion into the celebrated ſeats of learning; our own ſeminaries, at leaſt, till lately, were almoſt entirely confined to candidates for the miniſtry; and as on both theſe accounts, amongſt us, the intellectual improvement of our religious teachers, riſes ſuperior to that of private chriſtians, in a greater degree than in the national church; the influence of their opinions is wider in proportion. Diſclaiming as they do, all pretenſions to dominion, their public character, their profeſſional leiſure, the habits of ſtudy and compoſition which they acquire, concur to point them out as the natural guardians, in ſome meaſure, of our liberties and rights. Beſides, as they are appointed to teach the whole compaſs of ſocial duty, the mutual obligations of rulers and ſubjects, will, of neceſſity, fall under their notice, and they cannot explain or enforce the *reaſons* of ſubmiſſion, without diſplaying the *proper end* of government, and the *expectations* we may naturally form from it; which, when accurately done, will lead

lead into the very depths of political ſcience.

There is another reaſon, however, diſtinct from any I have yet mentioned, flowing from the nature of an eſtabliſhed religion, why diſſenting miniſters, above all men, ſhould be well ſkilled in the principles of freedom. Wherever, as in England, religion is eſtabliſhed by law with ſplendid emoluments and dignities, annexed to its profeſſion, the Clergy, who are candidates for theſe diſtinctions, will ever be prone to exalt the prerogative, not only in order to ſtrengthen the arm on which they lean, but that they may the more ſucceſsfully ingratiate themſelves in the favour of the Prince, by flattering thoſe ambitious views and paſſions which are too readily entertained by perſons poſſeſſed of ſupreme power. The boaſted alliance between church and ſtate, on which ſo many encomiums have been laviſhed, ſeems to have been little more than a compact between the Prieſt and the Magiſtrate, to betray the liberties of mankind, both civil and religi-

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ous. To this the Clergy on their part at leaſt have continued ſteady, ſhunning enquiry, fearful of change, blind to the corruptions of government, ſkilful to *diſcern the ſigns of the times*, and eager to improve every opportunity, and to employ all their art and eloquence to extend the prerogative, and ſmooth the approaches of arbitrary power. Individuals are illuſtrious exceptions to this cenſure; it however applies to the body, to none more than to thoſe whoſe exalted rank and extenſive influence determine its complexion and ſpirit. In this ſituation, the leaders of that church, in their fatal attempt to recommend and embelliſh a ſlaviſh ſyſtem of principles, will, I truſt, be ever carefully watched and oppoſed by thoſe who hold a ſimilar ſtation amongſt the diſſenters; that, at all events, there may remain one aſylum to which inſulted freedom may retire unmoleſted. Theſe conſiderations are ſufficient to juſtify every diſſenting miniſter in well-timed exertions for the public cauſe, and from them we may learn what opinion to entertain

tertain of Mr. Clayton's weak and malignant invectives.

From the general ſtrain of his diſcourſe it would be natural to conclude he was an enemy to every interference of miniſters on political occaſions; but this is not the caſe. *Miniſters*, ſays he, *may interfere as peace-makers, and by proper methods ſhould counteract the ſpirit of faction raiſed by perſons who ſeem born to vex the ſtate.* After having taught them to remain in a quiet neutrality, he inveſts them all at once with the high character of arbiters between the contending parties, without conſidering that an office of ſo much delicacy would demand a moſt intimate acquaintance with the pretenſions of both. Miniſters it ſhould ſeem, inſtead of declining political interference, are to become ſuch adepts in the ſcience of government, as to diſtinguiſh with preciſion the complaints of an oppreſſed party, from the clamours of a faction, to hold the balance between the ruler and the ſubject with a ſteady hand, *and to point out, on every occaſion, and counteract the perſons who*

are

are born to vex the ſtate. If any ſhould demand by what means they are to furniſh themſelves for ſuch extraordinary undertakings, he will learn it is not by political inveſtigation or enquiry this profound ſkill is to be attained, but by a ſtudied inattention and neglect, of which this author, it muſt be confeſſed, has given his Diſciples a moſt edifying example in his firſt eſſay. There is ſomething miraculous in theſe endowments. This battle is not to the ſtrong, nor theſe riches to men of underſtanding. Our author goes a ſtep farther, for when he is in the humour for conceſſions no man can be more liberal. *So far as revolutions*, ſays he, *are parts of God's plan of government, a Chriſtian is not to hinder ſuch changes in ſtates as promiſe an increaſe of happineſs to mankind. But no where in the New Teſtament can a Chriſtian find countenance in becoming a forward active man in regenerating the civil conſtitutions of nations.* A Chriſtian is not to oppoſe revolutions, as far as they are parts of God's plan of government. The direction which

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oracles afford, has ever been complained of for its obſcurity; and this of Mr. Clayton, though no doubt it is fraught with the profoundeſt wiſdom, would have been more uſeful had it furniſhed ſome criterion to diſtinguiſh thoſe tranſactions which *are* parts of God's plan of government. We have hitherto imagined the elements of nature, and the whole agency of man, are comprehended within the ſyſtem of divine Providence; but as in this ſenſe every thing becomes a part of the divine plan, it cannot be his meaning. Perhaps he means to confine the phraſe *of God's plan of government* to that portion of human agency which is conſiſtent with the divine will and promiſes, as he ſays an increaſe of happineſs to mankind. If this ſhould be his intention, the ſentiment is juſt, but utterly ſubverſive of the purpoſe for which it is introduced, as it concurs with the principle of all reformers in leaving us no other direction in theſe caſes, than reaſon and experience, determined in their exertions, by a regard to the general happineſs of

mankind. On this baſis the wildeſt projectors profeſs to erect their improvements. On this principle too do the diſſenters proceed, when they call for a repeal of the teſt act, when they lament the unequal repreſentation of parliament, when they wiſh to ſee a period to miniſterial corruption, and to the encroachments of an hierarchy equally ſervile and oppreſſive; and thus by one unlucky conceſſion this author has admitted the ground-work of reform in its fulleſt extent, and has demoliſhed the whole fabrick he was ſo eager to rear. He muſt not be offended if principles thus corrupt, and thus feebly ſupported, ſhould meet with the contempt they deſerve, but muſt ſeek his conſolation in his own adage, as the correction of folly is certainly *a part of God's plan of government*. The reader can be at no loſs to determine, whom the author intends by a *buſy active man in regenerating the civil conſtitutions of nations*. The occaſion of the ſermon, and complexion of its ſentiments, concur in directing us to Dr. Prieſtley; a

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perſon whom the author ſeems to regard with a more than *odium theologicum*, with a rancour exceeding the meaſure even of his profeſſion. The religious tenets of Dr. Prieſtley appear to me erroneous in the extreme, but I ſhould be ſorry to ſuffer any difference of ſentiment to diminiſh my ſenſibility to virtue, or my admiration of genius. From him the poiſoned arrow will fall pointleſs. His enlightened and active mind, his unwearied aſſiduity, the extent of his reſearches, the light he has poured into almoſt every department of ſcience, will be the admiration of that period, when the greater part of thoſe who have favoured, or thoſe who have oppoſed him, will be alike forgotten. Diſtinguiſhed merit will ever riſe ſuperior to oppreſſion, and will draw luſtre from reproach. The vapours which gather round the riſing ſun, and follow it in its courſe, ſeldom fail at the cloſe of it to form a magnificent theatre for its reception, and to inveſt with variegated tints, and with a ſoftened effulgence the luminary which they cannot hide.

It is a pity, however, our author in reproaching characters ſo illuſtrious was not a little more attentive to facts; for unfortunately for him Dr. Prieſtley has not in any inſtance diſplayed that diſaffection to government, with which he has been charged ſo wantonly. In his Lectures on Hiſtory, and his Eſſay on civil Government, which of all his publications fall moſt properly within the ſphere of politicks, he has delineated the Britiſh conſtitution with great accuracy, and has expreſſed his warm admiration of it as the beſt ſyſtem of policy the ſagacity of man has been able to contrive. In his Familiar Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham, a much later work, where the ſeeds of that implacable diſlike were ſcattered which produced the late riots, he has renewed that declaration, and has informed us, that he has been pleaſantly ridiculed by his friends as being an Unitarian in religion, and a Trinitarian in politicks. He has lamented, indeed, in common with every enlightened citizen, the exiſtence of certain corruptions, which being

ing gradually introduced into the conſtitution, have greatly impaired its vigour; but in this he has had the honour of being followed by the prime miniſter himſelf, who began his career by propoſing a reform in parliament, merely to court popularity it is true, at a time when it would not have been ſo ſafe for him to inſult the friends of freedom after having betrayed their intereſt, as he has ſince found it.

Dr. Prieſtley has, moreover, defended with great ability and ſucceſs the principles of our diſſent, expoſing, as the very nature of the undertaking demands, the folly and injuſtice of all clerical uſurpations; and on this account, if on no other, he is entitled to the gratitude of his brethren. In addition to this catalogue of crimes, he has ventured to expreſs his ſatisfaction on the liberation of France; an event, which, promiſing a firmer eſtabliſhment to liberty than any recorded in the annals of the world, is contemplated by the friends of arbitrary power throughout every kingdom of Europe with the utmoſt concern. Theſe are the

demerits

demerits of Dr. Prieſtley, for which this political aſtrologiſt and ſacred calculator of nativities, pronounces upon him that he is *born to vex the ſtate*. The beſt apology candour can ſuggeſt, will be to hope Mr. Clayton has never read Dr. Prieſtley's political works; a conjecture ſomewhat confirmed from his diſclaiming all attention to political theories, and from the extreme ignorance he diſplays through the whole of his diſcourſe on political topics. Still it is to be wiſhed he would have condeſcended to underſtand what he meant to confute, if it had been only to ſave himſelf the trouble and diſgrace of this publication.

The manner in which he ſpeaks of the Birmingham riots, and the cauſe to which he traces them, are too remarkable to paſs unnoticed.

When led, ſays he, ſpeaking of the ſufferers, *by officious zeal, from the quiet duties of their profeſſion, into the Senator's province: unhallowed boiſterous paſſions in others; like their own, God may permit to chaſtiſe them.* For my own part I was ſome time before

I could

I could develope this extraordinary paſſage; but I now find the darkneſs in which it is veiled is no more than that myſtic ſublimity, which has always tinctured the language of thoſe who are appointed to interpret the counſels of heaven.

I would not have Mr. Clayton deal too freely in theſe viſions, leſt the fire and illumination of the prophet ſhould put out the reaſon of the man, a caution the more neceſſary in the preſent inſtance, as it glimmers ſo feebly already in ſeveral parts of his diſcourſe, that its extinction would not be at all extraordinary. We are, no doubt, much obliged to Mr. Clayton for letting us into a ſecret we could never have learnt any other way. We thank him heartily for informing us, the Birmingham riots were a judgment, and, as we would wiſh to be grateful for ſuch an important communication, we would whiſper in his ear in return, that he ſhould be particularly careful not to ſuffer this itch of propheſying to grow upon him, men being extremely apt in this degenerate age to miſtake a prophet

for a madman, and to lodge them in the ſame place of confinement. The beſt uſe he could make of his mantle would be to bequeath it to the uſe of poſterity, as for the want of it I am afraid they will be in danger of falling into ſome very unhappy miſtakes. To their unenlightened eyes it will appear a reproach, that in the eighteenth century, an age that boaſts its ſcience and improvement, the firſt philoſopher in Europe, of a character unblemiſhed, and of manners the moſt mild and gentle, ſhould be torn from his family, and obliged to flee an outcaſt and a fugitive from the murderous hands of a frantic rabble; but when they learn that there were not wanting teachers of religion, who ſecretly triumphed in theſe barbarities, they will pauſe for a moment, and imagine they are reading the hiſtory of Goths or of Vandals. Erroneous as ſuch a judgment muſt appear in the eyes of Mr. Clayton, nothing but a ray of his ſupernatural light could enable us to form a juſter deciſion. Dr. Prieſtley and his friends are not the

firſt

firſt that have ſuffered in a public cauſe; and when we recollect, that thoſe who have ſuſtained ſimilar diſaſters have been generally conſpicuous for a ſuperior ſanctity of character, what but an acquaintance with the counſels of Heaven can enable us to diſtinguiſh between theſe two claſſes of ſufferers, and whilſt one are the favourites of God, to diſcern in the other the objects of his vengeance. When we contemplate this extraordinary endowment, we are no longer ſurprized at the ſuperiority he aſſumes through the whole of his diſcourſe, nor at that air of confuſion and diſorder which appears in it, both of which we impute to his dwelling ſo much in the inſufferable light, and amidſt the corruſcations and flaſhes of the divine glory; a ſublime but perilous ſituation, deſcribed with great force and beauty by Mr. Gray.

" He paſſed the flaming bounds of place and time:
" The living throne, the ſapphire blaze,
" Where Angels tremble, while they gaze,
" He ſaw; but blaſted with exceſs of light,
" Cloſed his eyes in endleſs night."

SECTION III.

On the Pretences Mr. Clayton advances in favour of his Principles.

HAVING endeavoured to juſtify the well timed exertions of Chriſtians and of Miniſters, in the cauſe of freedom, it may not be improper to examine a little more particularly under what pretences Mr. Clayton preſumes to condemn this conduct.

1ſt. The firſt that naturally preſents itſelf, is drawn from thoſe paſſages of ſcripture, in which the deſign of civil government is explained, and the duty of ſubmiſſion to civil authority is enforced. That on which the greateſt ſtreſs is laid, is found in the ninth chapter of the Epiſtle to the Romans. "Let every ſoul be ſubject to "the higher powers; for there is no power "but of God: the powers which are, are "ordained of God. Whoever therefore "reſiſteth the power, reſiſteth the ordi-"nance of God; and they that reſiſt, ſhall "receive

" receive unto themſelves damnation. The " Ruler is the Miniſter of God to thee for " good. But if thou doeſt that which is " evil, be afraid, for he beareth not the " ſword in vain. Wherefore ye muſt be " ſubject not only for wrath, but con- " ſcience ſake." This paſſage, which, from the time of Sir Robert Filmer to the preſent day, has been the ſtrong hold of the doctrine of paſſive obedience and non-reſiſtance, will admit of an eaſy ſolution, by attending to the nature of chriſtianity, and the circumſtances of its profeſſors, during the period it was written. The extraordinary privileges and dignity conferred by the Goſpel on believers, muſt have affected the minds of the firſt Chriſtians, juſt emerging from the ſhades of ignorance, and awakened to new hopes, with ſingular force. Feeling an elevation to which they were ſtrangers before, and looking down upon the world around them, as the vaſſals of ſin and ſatan, they might be eaſily tempted to imagine, the reſtraint of laws could not extend to perſons ſo highly pri-

vileged, and that it was ignominious in the free men of Jeſus Chriſt, to ſubmit to the yoke of idolatrous rulers. Natural to their ſituation as theſe ſentiments might be, none could be conceived of more detrimental to the credit and propagation of a riſing religion, or more likely to draw down upon its profeſſors the whole weight of the Roman empire, with which they were in no condition to contend. In this ſituation, it was proper for the Apoſtle, to remind Chriſtians, their religion did not interfere with the rights of princes, or diminiſh their obligation to attend to thoſe ſalutary regulations, which are eſtabliſhed for the protection of innocence, and the puniſhment of the guilty. That this only was the intention of the writer, may be inferred from the conſiderations he adduces to ſtrengthen his advice. He does not draw his arguments for ſubmiſſion from any thing *peculiar* to the *chriſtian ſyſtem*, as he muſt have done, had he intended to oppoſe that religion to the natural rights of mankind, but from the utility and neceſſity

of

of civil reſtraints. The Ruler is the Miniſter of God to thee for good, is the reaſon he urges for ſubmiſſion. Civil government, as if he had ſaid, is a ſalutary inſtitution, appointed to reſtrain and puniſh outrage and injuſtice, but exhibiting to the quiet and inoffenſive, nothing of which they need to be afraid. If thou doeſt that which is evil, be afraid, for he beareth not the "*ſword in vain.*" He is an avenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Chriſtians were not to conſider themſelves privileged above their fellow-citizens, as their religion conferred upon them no civil immunities, but left them ſubject to all the ties and reſtraints, whatever they were, which could be juſtly impoſed by the civil power, or any other part of mankind.

The limits of every duty muſt be determined by its *reaſons*, and the only ones aſſigned *here*, or that *can* be aſſigned for ſubmiſſion to civil authority, are its *tendency to do good*; wherever therefore this ſhall ceaſe to be the caſe, ſubmiſſion becomes abſurd,

abſurd, having no longer any *rational view*. But at what time this evil ſhall be judged to have arrived, or what remedy it may be proper to apply, chriſtianity does not decide, but leaves to be determined, by an appeal to natural reaſon and right. By one of the ſtrongeſt miſconceptions in the world, when we are taught that chriſtianity does not beſtow upon us any *new* rights, it has been thought to ſtrip us of our *old*; which is juſt the ſame as it would be to conclude, becauſe it did not firſt furniſh us with hands or feet, it obliges us to cut them off.

Under every form of government, that civil order which affords protection to property, and tranquillity to individuals, muſt be obeyed; and I have no doubt, that before the revolution in France, they who are now its warmeſt admirers, had they lived there, would have yielded a quiet ſubmiſſion to its laws, as being conſcious, the ſocial compact can only be conſidered as diſſolved, by an expreſſion of the general will. In the mean time, they would have continued firm in avowing the principles

ciples of freedom, and by the ſpread of political knowledge, have endeavoured to train and prepare the minds of their fellow-citizens, for accompliſhing a change ſo deſirable.

It is not neceſſary to enter into a particular examination of the other texts, adduced by Mr. Clayton in ſupport of his ſentiments, as this in Romans is by much the moſt to his purpoſe, and the remarks that have been made upon it may, with very little alteration, be applied to the reſt. He refers us to the ſecond chapter of the firſt epiſtle of Peter. "Submit yourſelves "to every ordinance of man for the Lord's "ſake; whether it be to the King as ſu-"preme, or unto Governors as unto them, "that are ſent by him, for the puniſh-"ment of evil doers, and for the praiſe of "them that do well." Here it is ſufficient to remark, all that can be inferred from this paſſage is, that Chriſtians are not to hold themſelves exempt from the obligation of obedience on account of their religion, but

but are to reſpect legiſlation as far as it is found productive of benefit in ſocial life.

With ſtill leſs propriety, he urges the firſt of Timothy, " where in the ſecond " chapter, we are exhorted to ſupplicati- " ons, prayers, interceſſions, and giving " of thanks for all men, for kings, and " for all that are in authority, that we may " lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all " godlineſs and honeſty." I am unacquainted with any who refuſe a compliance with this apoſtolical admonition, except the Nonjurors may be reckoned of this claſs, whoſe political ſentiments are of a piece with Mr. Clayton's.

Whilſt he pleads with ſo much eagerneſs for the duty of paſſive obedience, we are not, however, to ſuppoſe, he wiſhes to extend it to all mankind. He admits, " *that ſociety, under the wiſeſt regulations,* " *will degenerate, and there will be periods* " *when aſſociated bodies muſt be reſolved again* " *into its firſt principles.*" All reſiſtance to authority, every revolution, is not in his own opinion criminal; it is Chriſtians only, who

who are never to have a ſhare in theſe tranſactions, never to aſſert their rights. With what different ſentiments did the great apoſtle of the Gentiles contemplate his character, when diſdaining to accept a clandeſtine diſmiſſion from an unjuſt impriſonment, he felt a glow of indignant pride burn upon his cheek, and exclaimed with a Roman energy, " I was free born !"

2d. Another reaſon which this author aſſigns for a blind deference to civil authority is, that chriſtianity is " *diſtinct from*, " *and independant of human legiſlation.*" This principle no Proteſtant Diſſenter will be enclined to queſtion, but inſtead of lending any ſupport to the ſyſtem of paſſive obedience, it will overturn it from its foundation ; for if religion be really diſtinct from, and independant of human legiſlation, it cannot afford any ſtandard to aſcertain its limits ; as the moment it is applied to this purpoſe, it ceaſes to be a thing diſtinct and independent. For example, it is not doubted that a Chriſtian may lawfully engage in trade or commerce ; but if

it be aſked why his profeſſion does not interfere with ſuch an undertaking, the proper reply will be, religion is a thing diſtinct and independant. Should it be again inquired, why a Chriſtian may become a trader, yet muſt not commit a theft, we ſhould anſwer, that this latter action is not a thing diſtinct, or independant of religion, but falls immediately under its cognizance, as a violation of its laws. Thus it appears, that whatever portion of human conduct is really *independant* of religion, is lawful for that *very reaſon*, and can then only become criminal or improper, when it is ſuffered to intrench upon more ſacred or important duties. The truth is, between two inſtitutions, ſuch as civil government and religion, which have a ſeparate origin and end, no oppoſition can ſubſiſt, but in the brain of a diſtempered enthuſiaſt.

The author's text confutes his doctrine, for had our Saviour annihilated our rights, he would have become a *judge* and *divider* over us, in the worſt ſenſe, if that could be ſaid to be divided, which is taken away.

When any two inſtitutions are affirmed to be diſtinct and independant, it can only mean, they do not *interfere*; but that muſt be a genius of no common ſize, who can infer from religion not *interfering* with the rights of mankind, that they ceaſe to be, or that the patrimony, over which our Lord declined to exerciſe *any authority*, he has ſcattered and deſtroyed.

3d. Similar to the laſt I have conſidered, is that pretence for excluding Chriſtians from any concern in political affairs, taken from the conduct of our Saviour, Mr. Clayton tells us, that Chriſt uniformly waved intereſting himſelf in the concerns of the then exiſting government, and to the ſame purpoſe he afterwards remarks, he always declined the functions of a civil magiſtrate.

The moſt careleſs reader will remark, the whole weight of this argument reſts upon a ſuppoſition, that it is unlawful for a Chriſtian to ſuſtain any other character in civil life, than that in which our Saviour literally appeared; a notion as extravagant

as was ever nouriſhed in the brain of the wildeſt fanatic. Upon this principle he muſt have gone through ſuch a ſucceſſion of offices, and engaged in ſuch an endleſs variety of undertakings, that in place of thirty-three years, he needed to have lived thirty-three centuries. On this ground the profeſſion of phyſic is unlawful for a Chriſtian, becauſe our Lord never ſet up a diſpenſary; and that of law, becauſe he never pleaded at the bar. Next to the weakneſs of advancing ſuch abſurdity, is that of confuting it.

4th. The author, in proof of his political tenets, appeals to the devotional feelings of his hearers. "I aſk you, ſays he, "who make conſcience of entering into "your cloſets, and ſhutting your doors, "and praying to your Father which ſeeth "in ſecret; what ſubjects intereſt you moſt "then? Are not factious paſſions huſhed; "the undue heat you felt in political diſ-"putation, remembered with ſorrow!" He muſt be at a great loſs for argument, who will have recourſe to ſuch looſe and

flimſy

ſlimſy declamation. When engaged in devout admiration of the ſupreme Being, every other object will be loſt in the compariſon; but this, though the nobleſt employment of the mind, was never intended to ſhut out all other concerns. The affections which unite us to the world, have a large demand upon us, and muſt ſucceed in their turn. If every thing is to be deemed criminal, that does not intereſt the attention in the very moment of worſhip, political concerns are not the only ones to be abandoned, but every undertaking of a temporal nature, labour and ingenuity, muſt ceaſe. Science herſelf muſt ſhroud her light. Theſe are notions rather to be laughed at than confuted, for their extravagance will correct itſelf. Every attempt that has been made to rear religion on the ruins of nature, or to render it ſubverſive of the œconomy of life, has hitherto proved unſucceſsful, whilſt the inſtitutions that have flowed from it, are now ſcarcely regarded in any other light, than as humiliating monuments of human weakneſs and folly.

folly. The natural vigour of the mind, when it has once been opened by knowledge, and turned towards great and intereſting objects, will always overpower the illuſions of fanaticiſm; or could Mr. Clayton's principles be carried into effect, we ſhould ſoon behold men returning again to the ſtate of a ſavage, and a more than monkiſh barbarity and ignorance would overſpread the earth. That abſtraction from the world, it is his purpoſe to recommend, is in truth as inconſiſtent with the nature of religion, as with the ſtate and condition of man, for chriſtianity does not propoſe to take us *out* of the world, but to preſerve us from the pollutions which are *in* it.

It is eaſy to brand a paſſion for liberty with the odious epithet of faction; no two things, however, can be more oppoſite. Faction is a combination of a few to oppreſs the liberties of many; the love of freedom is the impulſe of an enlightened and preſiding ſpirit, ever intent upon the welfare of the community, or body to which it belongs, and ready to give the

alarm, when it beholds any unlawful conſpiracy formed, whether it be of rulers or of ſubjects, with a deſign to oppreſs it. Every tory upholds a faction; every whig, as far as he is ſincere and well informed, is a friend to the equal liberties of mankind. Abſurd as the preacher's appeal muſt appear, on ſuch an occaſion, to the devout feelings of his hearers, we have no need to decline it. In theſe ſolemn moments, factious paſſions cannot indeed be too much huſhed, but that warmth which animates the patriot, which glowed in the breaſt of a Sidney or a Hampden, was never chilled, or diminiſhed, we may venture to affirm, in its neareſt approaches to the uncreated ſplendour; and if it mingled with their devotion at all, could not fail to infuſe into it a freſh force and vigour, by drawing them into a cloſer aſſimilation to that great Being, who appears under the character of the avenger of the oppreſſed, and the friend and protector of the human race.

5th, Laſtly, the author endeavours to diſcredit the principles of freedom, by holding

ing them up as intimately connected with the Unitarian hereſy. " We are not to be " ſurprized, he ſays, if men who vacate " the rule of faith in Jeſus Chriſt, ſhould " be defective in deference, and in obedi- " ent regards to men, who are raiſed to " offices of ſuperior influence, for the pur- " poſes of civil order and public good." The perſons he has in view are the Unitarians, and that my reader may be in full poſſeſſion of this moſt curious argument, it may be proper to inform him, that an Unitarian is a perſon who believes Jeſus Chriſt had no exiſtence till he appeared on our earth, whilſt a Trinitarian maintains, that he exiſted with the Father from all eternity. What poſſible connection can he diſcern between theſe opinions and the ſubject of government?

In order to determine, whether the ſupreme power ſhould be veſted in king, lords, and commons, as in England, in an aſſembly of nobles as in Venice, or in a houſe of repreſentatives, as in America or France, muſt we firſt decide upon the per-

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ſon of Chriſt. I ſhould imagine we might as well apply to aſtronomy firſt, to learn whether the earth flattens at the poles. He explains what he means by *vacating* the rule of faith in Chriſt, when he charges the Unitarians with a partial denial at leaſt, of the inſpiration of the ſcriptures, particularly the Epiſtles of St. Paul. But however clear the inſpiration of the ſcriptures may be, as no one pleads for the inſpiration of civil governors, the deference which is due to the firſt, as coming from God, can be no reaſon for an unlimited ſubmiſſion to the latter. Yet this is Mr. Clayton's argument, and it runs thus. Every oppoſition to ſcripture is criminal, becauſe it is inſpired, and therefore every reſiſtance to temporal rulers is criminal, though they are *not* inſpired.

The number of paſſages in Paul's Epiſtles, which treat of civil government, is ſmall, the principal of them have been examined, and whether they are inſpired or not, has not the remoteſt relation to the queſtion before us. The inſpiration of an

author adds weight to his ſentiments, but makes no alteration in his meaning, and unleſs Mr. Clayton can ſhow that Paul inculcates unlimited ſubmiſſion, the belief of his inſpiration can yield no advantage to his cauſe. Amongſt thoſe parties of Chriſtians who have maintained the inſpiration of the ſcriptures in its utmoſt extent, the number of ſuch as have inferred from them the doctrine of paſſive obedience, has been extremely ſmall; it is therefore ridiculous to impute the rejection of this tenet by Unitarians, to a diſbelief of plenary inſpiration. It behoves Mr. Clayton to point out, if he is able, any one of the Unitarians, who ever imagined that Paul means to recommend unlimited obedience; for till that is the caſe, it is plain, their political opinions cannot have ariſen from any contempt of that Apoſtle's authority.

As there is no foundation in the nature of things, for imagining any alliance between heretical tenets and the principles of freedom, this notion is equally void of ſupport from fact or hiſtory. Were the Socinian

nian ſentiments, in particular, productive of any *peculiar impatience under* the reſtraints of government, this effect could not fail of having made its appearance on their firſt riſe in Poland, while their influence was freſh and vigorous, but nothing of this nature occurred, or was any ſuch reproach caſt upon them. That ſect in England which has been always moſt conſpicuous for the love of freedom, have for the moſt part held ſentiments, at the greateſt remove from Socinianiſm that can be imagined. The ſeeds of thoſe political principles which broke out with ſuch vigour in the reign of Charles Iſt, and have ſince given riſe to the denomination of whigs, were ſown in the latter end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, by the hand of the puritans, amongſt whom the Unitarian doctrine was then utterly unknown. The Diſſenters deſcended from thoſe illuſtrious anceſtors, and inheriting their ſpirit, have been foremoſt in defence of liberty, not only, or chiefly, of late, ſince the ſpread of the Socinian

doctrine, but before that ſyſtem had gained any footing amongſt us.

The knowledge and ſtudy of the ſcriptures, far from favouring the pretenſions of deſpotiſm, have almoſt ever diminiſhed it, and been attended with a proportional increaſe of freedom. The union of proteſtant Princes preſerved the liberties of the Germanick body when they were in danger of being overwhelmed by the victorious arm of Charles Vth; yet a veneration for the ſcriptures, at a time when they had almoſt fallen into oblivion, and an appeal to their deciſions in all points, was the grand characteriſtic of the new religion. If we look into Turkey, we ſhall find the leaſt of that impatience under reſtraints, Mr. Clayton laments, of any place in the world, though Paul and his epiſtles are not much ſtudied there.

There are not wanting reaſons, which at firſt view might induce us to conclude, unitarianiſm was leſs favourable to the love of freedom than almoſt any other ſyſtem of religious belief. If any party of Chriſtians were

were ever free from the leaſt tincture of enthuſiaſm, it is the unitarian: yet that paſſion has by every philoſopher been judged friendly to liberty; and to its influence, though perhaps improperly, ſome of its moſt diſtinguiſhed exertions have been aſcribed. Hume and Bolingbroke, who were Atheiſts, leaned towards arbitrary power. Owen, Howe, Milton, Baxter, ſome of the moſt devout and venerable characters that ever appeared, were warmly attached to liberty, and held ſentiments on the ſubject of government as free and unfettered as Dr. Prieſtley. Thus every pretence for confounding the attachment to freedom with the ſentiments of a religious party, is moſt abundantly confuted both from reaſon and from fact. The zeal Unitarians have diſplayed in defence of civil and religious liberty, is the ſpirit natural to a minority, who are well aware they are viewed by the eccleſiaſtical powers with an unparalleled malignity and rancour. Let the Diſſenters at large remember they too are a minority, a great minority, and that they muſt look

for

for their ſecurity from the ſame quarter, not from the compliments of biſhops, or preſents from maids of honour *.

To abandon principles, which the beſt and moſt enlightened men have in all ages held ſacred, which the Diſſenters in particular have rendered themſelves illuſtrious by defending, which have been ſealed and conſecrated by the blood of our anceſtors, for no other reaſon than that the Unitarians chance to maintain them, would be a weakneſs of which a child might be aſhamed! Whoever may think fit to take up the gauntlet in the Socinian controverſy will have my warmeſt good wiſhes; but let us not employ thoſe arms againſt each other which were given us for our common defence.

* Some of my readers perhaps need to be informed that I here allude to Mr. Martin, who, for ſimilar ſervices to thoſe Mr. Clayton is now performing, has been conſiderably careſſed by certain biſhops who have condeſcended to notice and to viſit him. I think we do not read that Judas had any acquaintance with the high prieſts till he came to tranſact buſineſs with them.

SECTION

SECTION IV.

On the Teſt Act.

AMIDST all the wild excentricities, which, abounding in every part of this extraordinary publication, naturally diminiſh our wonder at any thing ſuch a writer may advance, I confeſs I am ſurpriſed at his declaring his wiſh for the continuance of the Teſt Act. This law, enacted in the latter end of the reign of Charles IId, to ſecure the nation from popery, when it ſtood upon the brink of that precipice, is continued, now that the danger no longer exiſts which firſt occaſioned it, for the expreſs purpoſe of preſerving the church from the inroads of Diſſenters. That church, it muſt be remembered, exiſted for ages before it received any ſuch protection; yet is it now the vogue to magnify its importance to that degree, that one would imagine it was its ſole prop, whoſe removal would draw the whole fabrick after it, or at leaſt

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make it totter to its baſe. Whether theſe apprehenſions were really entertained by the clergy who gave the ſignal for the commencement of hoſtilities on a late occaſion, or whether they were only impelled by that illiberal tincture, and fixed antipathy to all who differ from them, which hath ever marked their character, may be doubted; but to behold a Diſſenting Miniſter joining with them in an unnatural warfare againſt his brethren, is a phenomenon ſo curious, that it prompts us to enquire into its cauſe. Let us hear his reaſons. He and many others were convinced, he tells us, "that "ſome of the perſons who applied for the "repeal were influenced by enmity againſt "the doctrinal articles of the eſtabliſhed "church, and they could not ſacrifice their "pious regard to truth, though in a "church they had ſeparated from, to the "policy of men, who with reſpect to God "our Saviour only conſult how they may "caſt him down from his excellency." When we hear the clergy exclaim that their church is in danger, we pretty well un-

derſtand what they mean; they ſpeak broad, as Mr. Burke ſays, and intend no more than that its emoluments are endangered; but when a ſerious Diſſenter expreſſes his pious regard to the doctrines of the church, it is the *truth* of thoſe articles he muſt be ſuppoſed to have in view. Let us conſider for a moment what advantage the Teſt Act is capable of yielding them. All thoſe who qualify for civil offices, by a ſubmiſſion to this law, conſiſt of two claſſes of people; they are either perſons who are attached to the articles of the church, from whom therefore no danger could accrue; or they are perſons who have ſignified their aſſent to doctrines which they inwardly diſapprove, and who have qualified themſelves for truſt by a ſolemn act of religious deception. It is this latter claſs alone, it ſhould be remembered, whom the Teſt Act can at all influence, and thus the only ſecurity this celebrated law can afford the articles of the church, is founded in a flagrant violation of truth in the perſons who become their guarantees. Every attempt that has been

made to uphold religion by the civil arm, has reflected diſgrace upon its authors; but of all that are recorded in the hiſtory of the World, perhaps this is the moſt abſurd in its principle, and the leaſt effectual in its operation. For the truth of ſacred myſteries in religion, it appeals to the corrupteſt principles of the human heart, and to thoſe *only*; for no one can be tempted by the Teſt Act, to profeſs an attachment to the doctrines of the church, till he has been already allured by the dignity or emolument of a civil office. By compelling all who exerciſe any function in the ſtate, from the perſon who aſpires to its higheſt diſtinctions, to thoſe who fill the meaneſt offices in it, to profeſs that concurrence in religious opinions which is known never to exiſt, it is adapted beyond any other human invention, to ſpread amongſt all orders of men a contempt for ſacred inſtitutions, to inthrone hypocriſy, and reduce deception to a ſyſtem! The truth of any ſet of opinions can only be perceived by *evidence*; but what evidence can any one derive from the mere

mechanical

mechanical action of receiving bread and wine at the hands of a pariſh Prieſt? He who believes them already needs not to be initiated by any ſuch ceremony; and by what magick touch thoſe ſimple elements are to convert the unbeliever, our author, who is maſter of ſo many ſecrets, has not condeſcended to explain. He will not pretend to impute the firſt ſpread of theſe doctrines in the infancy of the chriſtian religion, or their revival at the reformation to any ſuch means, ſince he imagines he can trace them in the New Teſtament. It is ſtrange if that evidence which was powerful enough to introduce them where they were unknown, is not ſufficient to uphold them where they are already profeſſed and believed. At leaſt the Teſt Act, it muſt be confeſſed, has yielded them no advantage, for they have been controverted with more acrimony, and admitted by a ſmaller number of perſons, ſince that law was enacted, than in any period preceding.

Were the removal of this Teſt to overthrow the eſtabliſhment itſelf, a conſe-

quence at the ſame time in the higheſt degree improbable, the articles of the church, if they are true, would remain unendangered, their evidence would continue unimpaired, an appeal to the inſpired writings from which they profeſs to be derived would be open, the liberty of diſcuſſion would be admitted in as great an extent as at preſent; this difference only would occur, that an attachment to them would no longer be ſuſpected of flowing from corrupt and ſiniſter motives. They would ceaſe to be with the clergy, the ladder of promotion, the cant of the pulpit, the ridicule of the ſchools. The futility of this or any other law, as a ſecurity to religious doctrines, may be diſcerned from this ſingle reflection, that in the national church its own articles have for a length of time been either treated with contempt, or maintained with little ſincerity, and no zeal; whilſt amongſt the Diſſenters, where they have had no ſuch aids, they have found a congenial ſoil, and continue to flouriſh with vigour.

On the political complexion of this Teſt, as it does not fall ſo properly within my preſent view, I ſhall content myſelf with remarking, that harmleſs as it may appear at firſt ſight, it carries in it the ſeeds of all the perſecutions and calamities which have ever been ſuſtained on a religious account. It proſcribes not an individual who has been convicted of a crime, but a whole party, as unfit to be truſted by the community to which they belong; and if this ſtigma can be juſtly fixed on any ſet of men, it ought not to ſtop *here, or any where,* ſhort of the actual exciſion of thoſe who are thus conſidered as rotten and incurable members of the political body. In annexing to religious ſpeculation the idea of political default, the principle of this law would juſtify every exceſs of ſeverity and rigour. If we are the perſons it ſuppoſes, its indulgence is weak and contemptible; if we are of a different deſcription, the nature of its pretenſions is ſo extraordinary as to occaſion ſerious alarm, and call aloud for its repeal. Mr. Clayton, indeed,

indeed, calls this, and ſimilar laws, a reſtraint very prudently impoſed upon thoſe who diſſent from the eſtabliſhed religion *.

This reſtraint, however, is no leſs than a political annihilation, debarring them, though their talents were ever ſo ſplendid, from mingling in the councils, or poſſeſſing any ſhare in the adminiſtration of their country. With that natural reliſh for abſurdity, which characterizes this author, he imagines they have juſtly incurred this evil for diſſenting from an *erroneous* religion.

He tells us, in the courſe of his ſermon †, that the grand "principle of ſepa-"ration from the church lies in the un-"worldly nature of our Saviour's king-"dom." This reaſon for ſeparation implies, that any attempt to blend worldly intereſts or policy with the conſtitution of a church, is improper; but how could this be done more effectually than by rendering the profeſſion of its articles a preliminary ſtep to every kind of civil pre-eminence. Yet this abuſe, which in his own eſtima-

* Page 6. † Page 35.

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tion is ſo enormous as to form the great baſis of ſeparation, he wiſhes to perpetuate; and, all things conſidered, hopes "that "which is at reſt will not be diſturbed." In another part of his diſcourſe *, he aſks what temporalities has the church of Chriſt to expect? It is the mother of Harlots, which ſays, "I ſit a queen, and ſhall ſee no ſorrow." Would any one imagine this was the language of a man, who, in pleading for a Teſt Act, has reſted the ſupport of his creed on thoſe very temporalities he affects ſo much to diſdain, and has committed his religion to the arms of that mother of harlots to be reared and nouriſhed! When ſpeaking of the Teſt Act in the ſeventh page of his diſcourſe, he thus expreſſes himſelf, "Surely the Croſs of Chriſt ought not to be inſulted by perſons eager to preſs into the temple of Mammon." Who could treat it with more poignant ſeverity than is couched in this declaration; yet this is the language of a perſon who deſires its continuance. In truth, his re-

* Page 26.

preſentations

preſentations on this ſubject are pregnant with ſuch contradictions, and riſe above each other in ſo regular a gradation of abſurdity as will not eaſily be conceived, and perhaps hath ſcarce ever been equalled. At the very outſet of his ſermon, he declares, " whenever the goſpel is ſecularized " it is debaſed and miſrepreſented, and in " proportion to the quantity of foreign in- " fuſions is the efficacy of this ſaving health " diminiſhed." But human ingenuity would be at a loſs to contrive a method of ſecularizing the goſpel more completely, than by rendering it the common paſſport of all who aſpire to civil diſtinctions. I am really weary of expoſing the wild and extravagant incoherence of ſuch a reaſoner. From a man, who profeſſing to be the apologiſt of his party, betrays its intereſts, and exhibits its moſt illuſtrious members to reproach, who himſelf a Diſſenter, applauds the penalties which the hierarchy has inflicted as a " *prudent reſtraint*;" who, with the utmoſt poignance, cenſures a law which he ſolemnly invokes the legiſlature to perpetuate;

petuate; and propoſes to ſecure the truths of religion, by the "prophanation of its "Sacraments *," by "debaſing the Goſ-"pel," and "inſulting the Croſs;" any thing may be expected but conſiſtence and decency. When ſuch an author aſſures us he was not impelled by vanity to publiſh †, we may eaſily give him credit; but he ſhould remember, though it may be a virtue to ſubdue vanity, it is baſe to extinguiſh ſhame. The tear which, he tells us, ſtarted from the eyes of his audience, we will hope, for their honour, was an effuſion of regret, natural to his friends, on hearing him deliver ſentiments which they conſidered as a diſgrace to himſelf, and a calumny on his brethren. His affecting to pour contempt upon Dr. Price, whoſe talents and character were revered by all parties, and to hold him up as the *corrupter* of the Diſſenters, will not fail to awaken the indignation of every generous mind. Whether *they* were greater friends to their country, whoſe pride and oppreſſion ſcattered the flames of

* See page 8. † Page 6.

diſcord acroſs the atlantick, poured deſolation into the colonies, diſmembered the empire, and involved us in millions of debt; or the man, who, with a warning voice, endeavoured to avert thoſe calamities, poſterity will decide.

He gives us a pompous enumeration * of the piety, learning, and talents of a large body of his brethren who concur with him in a diſapprobation of the theological and political tenets of the Unitarians. The weakneſs of mingling them together has been ſhown already; but if theſe great and eminent men, whom the world never heard of before, poſſeſs that zeal for their religion they pretend, let them meet their opponents on the open field of controverſy, where they may diſplay their talents and proweſs to ſomewhat more advantage than in *ſkulking* behind a *conſecrated altar*.

There are many particulars in the addreſs and ſermon of an extraordinary complexion, which I have not noticed at all, as it was not my intention to follow the author ſtep

* See page 6.

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by ſtep, but rather to collect his ſcattered repreſentations into ſome leading points of view. For the ſame reaſon, I make no remarks on his barbarous imagery; or his ſtile, every where incoherent and incorrect, ſometimes indecent, which cannot fail of diſguſting every reader of taſte. In a rude daubing peculiar to himſelf, where in ridicule of Dr. Prieſtley he has grouped together, a *foreigner*, a *ſhip*, and *cargo* of *drugs*, he has unfortunately ſketched his own likeneſs, except in the circumſtance of the *ſhip*, with tolerable accuracy; for, without the apology of having been *ſhipped* into England, he is certainly a *foreigner* in his native tongue, and his publication will be allowed to be a *drug*.

Had he known to apply the remark with which his addreſs commences, on the utility of accommodating inſtruction to the exigence of times, he would have been aware, that this is not a ſeaſon for drawing off the eyes of mankind from political objects. They were in fact never turned towards them with equal ardour, and we may

venture to affirm, they will long continue to take that direction. An attention to the political aſpect of the world, is not now the fruit of an idle curioſity, or the amuſement of a diſſipated and frivolous mind, but is awakened and kept alive by occurrences as various as they are extraordinary. There are times when the moral world ſeems to ſtand ſtill; there are others when it ſeems impelled towards its goal, with an accelerated force. The preſent is a period more intereſting, perhaps, than any which has been known, in the whole flight of time. The ſcenes of Providence thicken upon us ſo faſt, and are ſhifted with ſo ſtrange a rapidity, as if the great drama of the world were drawing to a cloſe. Events have taken place, of late, and revolutions have been effected, which, had they been foretold a very few years ago, would have been viewed as viſionary and extravagant, and their influence is yet far from being ſpent. Europe never preſented ſuch a ſpectacle before, and it is worthy of being contemplated, with the profoundeſt

attention,

attention, by all its inhabitants. The empire of darkneſs and of deſpotiſm, has been ſmitten with a ſtroke which has ſounded through the univerſe. When we ſee whole kingdoms, after repoſing for centuries on the lap of their rulers, ſtart from their ſlumber, the dignity of man riſing up from depreſſion, and tyrants trembling on their thrones, who can remain entirely indifferent, or fail to turn his eye towards a theatre ſo auguſt and extraordinary. Theſe are a kind of throes and ſtruggles of nature, to which it would be a ſullenneſs to refuſe our ſympathy. Old foundations are breaking up; new edifices are rearing. Inſtitutions which have been long held in veneration, as the moſt ſublime refinements of human wiſdom and policy, which age hath cemented and confirmed, which power hath ſupported, which eloquence hath conſpired to embelliſh and opulence to enrich, are falling faſt into decay. New proſpects are opening on every ſide, of ſuch amazing variety and extent, as to ſtretch farther than

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the eye of the moſt enlightened obſerver can reach.

Some beneficial effects appear to have taken place already, ſufficient to nouriſh our moſt ſanguine hope of benefits much more extenſive. The miſchief and folly of wars begin to be underſtood, and that mild and liberal ſyſtem of policy adopted, which has ever indeed been the object of prayer to the humane and the devout, but has hitherto remained utterly unknown in the cabinets of princes. As the mind naturally yields to the impreſſion of objects which it contemplates often, we need not wonder, if, amidſt events ſo extraordinary, the human character itſelf ſhould appear to be altering and improving apace. That fond attachment to ancient inſtitutions, and blind ſubmiſſion to opinions already received, which has ever checked the growth of improvement, and drawn on the greateſt benefactors of mankind danger, or neglect, is giving way to a ſpirit of bold and fearleſs inveſtigation. Man ſeems to be becoming more erect and independant. He leans

leans more on himſelf, leſs on his fellow-creatures. He begins to feel a conſciouſneſs in a higher degree of perſonal dignity, and is leſs enamoured of artificial diſtinctions. There is ſome hope of our beholding that ſimplicity and energy of character which marks his natural ſtate, blended with the humanity, the elegance and improvement of poliſhed ſociety.

The events which have already taken place, and the further changes they forebode, will open to the contemplative of every character, innumerable ſources of reflection. To the philoſopher, they preſent many new and extraordinary facts, where his penetration will find ample ſcope in attempting to diſcover their cauſe, and to predict their effects. He will have an opportunity of viewing mankind in an intereſting ſituation, and of tracing the progreſs of opinion through channels it has rarely flowed in before. The politician will feel his attention powerfully awakened, on ſeeing new maxims of policy introduced, new inſtitutions eſtabliſhed, and ſuch a total alteration

teration in the ideas of a great part of the world, as will oblige him to ſtudy the art of government as it were afreſh. The devout mind will behold in theſe momentous changes, the finger of God, and diſcerning in them the dawn of that glorious period, in which wars will ceaſe, and anti-chriſtian tyranny ſhall fall, will adore that unerring wiſdom, whoſe ſecret operation never fails to conduct all human affairs to their proper iſſue, and impels the great actors on that troubled theatre, to fulfil, when they leaſt intend it, the counſels of heaven, and the predictions of its prophets.

4 OC 58

FINIS.